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The Proletariat

Adapted from the German of
Karl Kautsky.

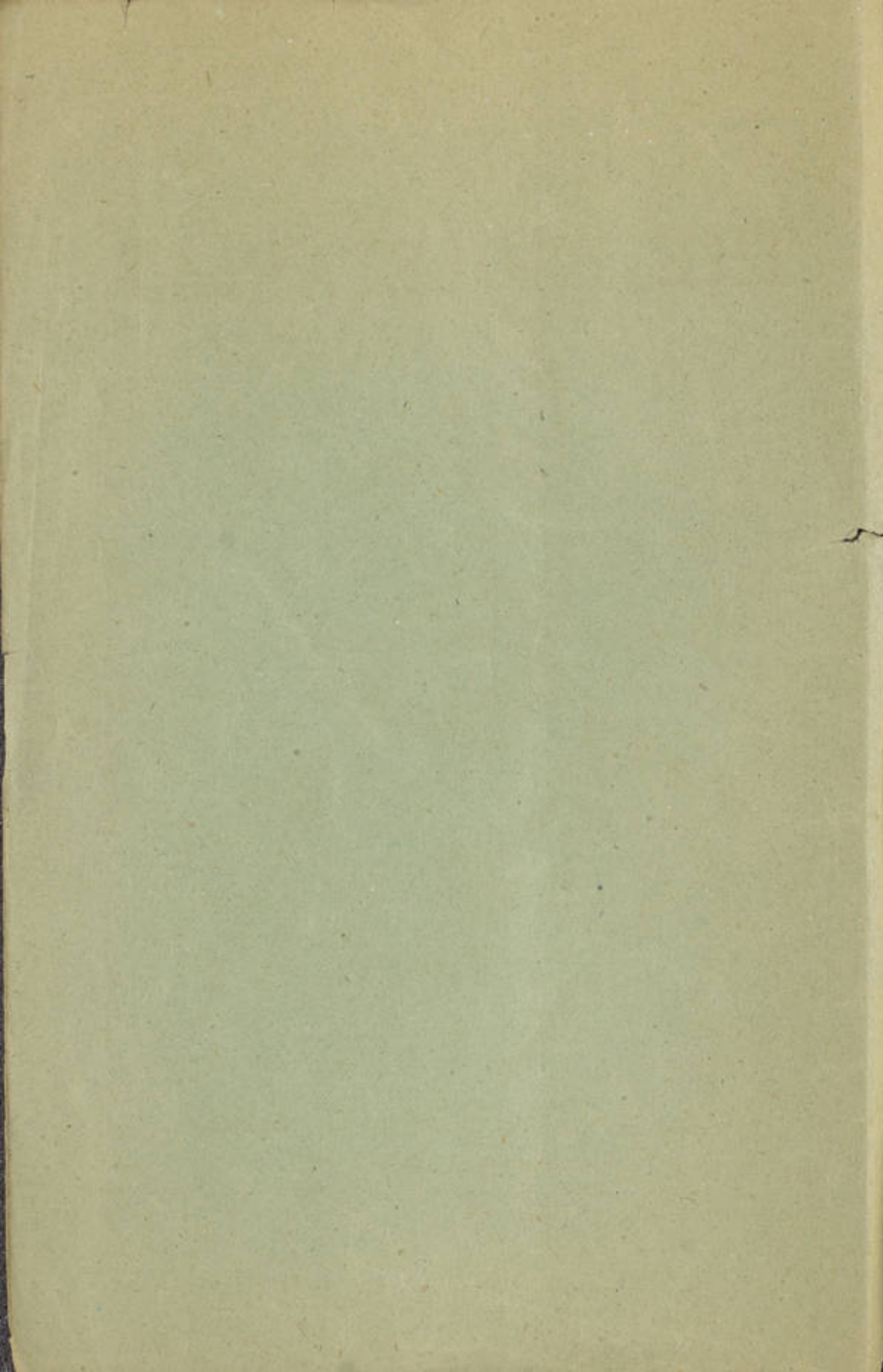


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KARL KAUTSKY.

THE PROLETARIAT.



ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN

OF

KARL KAUTSKY.



SOCIALISTIC CO-OPERATIVE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

184 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK

1901.

THE PROLETARIAT.



ADAPTED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY HENRY K. L. TAYLOR



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THE PROLETARIAT.

(Adapted from the German of Karl Kautsky.)

I.

EFFECT OF MACHINERY.

In all countries in which the capitalist system of production prevails, especially in such countries as the United States where capitalism has reached the point of production on a large scale, we find the population divided mainly into two classes: first, the capitalists, who possess the means of production—tools, machinery, land, etc., but who take no part in production itself; and secondly, the wage-workers, the proletariat, who possess nothing but their labor power, on the sale of which they live, and whose labor alone brings forth the whole wealth of the land.

Capitalists need a large supply of proletarians; originally, in other countries and in ages gone by, forcible methods were resorted to, to furnish this requisite supply. To-day, however, in the United States especially, such methods are no longer needed. The superior power of capitalist production on a large scale over small production is to-day sufficient, without doing open violence to the law or to private property, but on the contrary, with the very assistance of these, year in year out to strip of all property a sufficient number of small farmers and industrialists, who are then thrown upon the streets, who merge with the mass of the proletariat, and who thereby satisfy the ever increasing capitalist demand for more human flesh.

That the number of the proletariat is steadily on the increase in this country is such a palpable fact that even they who would make us believe that society to-day rests upon the same basis that it did a hun-

dred years ago, and who try to paint in rosy colors the picture of the small producer, no longer attempt to deny it. Indeed, a revolution has taken place in the make-up of society, the same as it has in the system of production. The capitalist form of production has overthrown all others and become the dominant one in the field of industry; similarly wage-labor is to-day the dominant form of labor; a hundred years ago the farming peasantry took the first place; later, the small city industrialists; to-day it is the wage-earner or proletariat.

In all civilized countries the proletarians are to-day the largest class; it is their condition and modes of thought that control those of all the other divisions of labor. This state of things implies a complete revolution in the condition and thought of the bulk of the population. The conditions of the proletariat differ radically from those of all other former categories of labor. The small farmer, the artisan, the small producers generally, were, namely, the owners of the product of their labor by reason of their ownership of the means of production; contrariwise, the product of the labor of the proletarian does not belong to him, it belongs to the capitalist, to the purchaser of his labor-power, to the owner of the requisite instruments of production. True enough the proletariat is paid therefor by the capitalists, but the value of his wages is far below that of his product.

When the capitalist in industry—and let it be here said, once for all, that, at the present stage of development in production, agriculture is as much an industry as any other—purchases the only commodity which the proletarian can offer for sale, to wit, his labor power, he does so for the only purpose of utilizing it in a profitable way. The more the workingman produces the larger the value of his product. If the capitalist were to work his employes only long enough to produce the worth of the wages he pays them, he would clear no profits. But however willing the capitalist is to pose as the benefactor of suffering humanity, his capital cries for “profits” and finds in him a willing listener. The longer the time is extended during which the workmen labor in the service of the capitalists, over and above the time needed to cover their wages, the larger is the value of their product, the larger is the surplus over and above the capitalist outlay in wages, and the larger is the quantity of exploitation to which these workmen are subjected. This exploitation or fleecing of labor finds a limit only in the powers of endurance of the working people and in the resistance which they may be able to offer to their exploiters.

In capitalist production, the capitalist and the wage-worker are not active together as the employer and employed used to be in pre-

vious industrial epochs. The capitalist soon develops into, and remains essentially, a merchant. His activity, in so far as he may be at all active, limits itself, like that of the merchant, to the operations of the market. His labors consist in purchasing as cheaply as possible the raw material, labor power and other essentials, and to turn around and sell the finished products as dearly as possible. Upon the field of production itself he does nothing except to secure the largest quantity of labor from the workmen for the least possible amount of wages, and thereby to squeeze out of them the largest possible quantity of surplus values. With regard to his workmen he is not a fellow-worker, he is only a driver, an exploiter. The longer they work, the better off he is; he is not tired out if the hours of labor are unduly extended; he does not perish if the method of production becomes a murderous one. In comparison with all former ruling classes the capitalist is the most reckless of the life and safety of his operatives. Extension of the hours of work, abolition of holidays, introduction of night labor, damp or overheated factories filled with poisonous gases, such are the "improvements" which the capitalist mode of production has introduced for the benefit of the working class.

The introduction of machinery increases still further the danger to life and limb for the workingman. The machine system fetters him to a monster that moves perpetually with a gigantic power and with insane speed. Only the closest, never-flagging attention can protect the workingman, attached to such a machine, from being seized and broken by it. Protective measures cost money; the capitalist does not introduce them unless he is forced thereto. Economy being the much vaunted virtue of the capitalist, he is constrained by it to save room and to squeeze as much machinery as possible into the workshop. What cares he that the limbs of his workingmen are thereby endangered? Workingmen are cheap, but large airy workshops are dear.

There is still another respect in which the capitalist application of machinery lowers the condition of the working class. It is this: The tool of the former mechanic was cheap; it was subject to few changes that would render it useless. It is otherwise with the machine; in the first place it costs money, much money; in the second place, if, through improvements in the system, it becomes useless, or if it is not used to its full capacity, it will bring loss instead of profit to the capitalist. Again, the machine is worn out not only through use but through idleness; furthermore, the introduction of science into production, the result of which is the machine itself, causes constant new discoveries and inventions to take the place of older ones, and renders constantly, now

this, then that sort of machine, and often whole factories at once, unable to compete with the improved ones before they have been used up to their full extent. Therefore, owing to these constant changes, every machine is in constant danger of being made useless before it is used up; this is sufficient ground for the capitalist to utilize his machine as quickly as possible from the moment he puts it in operation; in other words, the capitalist application of the system of machinery is a particular spur that drives the capitalist to extend the hours of labor as much as possible, to carry on production without interruption, to introduce the system of night and day shifts, and, accordingly, to rear the unwholesome system of night work into a permanent system.

At the time the system of machinery began to develop, some ideologists declared the golden age was at hand: the machine was to release the workingman and render him a free man. In the hands of the capitalist, however, the machine has become the most powerful lever towards making heavier the load of labor borne by the proletariat, and to aggravate his servitude into an unbearable condition.

But it is not only with regard to the hours of work that the condition of the wage-worker and proletariat has suffered with the introduction of machinery. It suffered also with regard to his wages. The proletarian, the workman of to-day, does not eat at the table of the capitalist; he does not live in the same house. However wretched his home may be; however miserable his food, nay, even though he may famish, the well-being of the capitalist is not disturbed by the sickening sight. The words Wages and Starvation used to be opposites; the free workingman could formerly starve only when he had no work. Whoever worked earned Wages, he had enough to eat, Starvation was not his lot. The unenviable distinction was reserved for the capitalist system of production to reconcile these two opposites—Wages and Starvation—, and to raise Starvation-Wages into a permanent institution, yea, into a prop of the present social system.

II.

WAGES.

Wages can never rise so high as to make it impossible for the capitalist to carry on his business and live; under such circumstances, it would be more profitable for the capitalist to give up his business. Consequently, the wages of the workingman can never rise high

enough to equal the value of his product. They must always be below that, so as to leave a surplus; it is only the prospect of a surplus that moves the capitalist to purchase labor-power. It is therefore evident that in the capitalist social system the wages of the workmen can never rise high enough to put an end to the exploitation of labor.

This surplus, which the capitalist class appropriates, is larger than is usually imagined. It covers not only the "profits" of the manufacturer but many other items that are usually credited to the costs of production and exchange. It covers, for instance, rent, interest on loans, salaries, merchant's profits, taxes, etc. All these have to be covered with the surplus, that is, the excess of the value of the product over the wages of the workingman. It is evident that this surplus must be a considerable one if a concern is to "pay"; the exploitation of the workingman must be great, even where the wages are high. It is clear that the wages of the workingman cannot rise high enough to be even approximately equal to the value of his product. The capitalist wages system means, under all circumstances, the thorough exploitation of the working class. It is impossible to abolish this exploitation without abolishing the system itself.

But wages rarely reach the highest point which they might even under these circumstances; more often they are found to be nearer to the lowest possible point. This point is reached when the wages do not even supply the workman with the barest necessities. When the workingman not only starves but starves rapidly, all work is at end.

The wages swing between these two extremes; they are found to be lower the lower the necessities of the workman, the larger the supply of labor in the labor market, and the slighter the capacity of the workingman for resistance.

In general, wages must be high enough to keep the workingman in a condition to work, or, to speak more accurately, they must be high enough to secure to the capitalist the measure of labor-power which he needs. In other words, wages must be high enough, not only to keep the workingmen in a condition to work, but also in a condition to produce children who may be able to replace them. It follows that the industrial development has a tendency that is most pleasing to the capitalist, to wit, to lower the necessities of the workingman in order that his wages may be lower in proportion.

There was a time when skill and strength were requisites for a workingman. The period of apprenticeship was then long, the cost of his training considerable. Now, however, the progress made in the

division of labor and the system of machinery render skill and strength in production more and more superfluous; they make it possible to substitute unskilled and cheap workmen for skilled ones; and consequently, to substitute weak women and even children in the place of men. Already in the early stages of manufactory this tendency is perceptible; but not until machinery is introduced into production does the wholesale exploitation commence of women and children of tender age—an exploitation of the most helpless among the helpless, who are made a prey of shocking maltreatment and abuse. Thus machinery develops a new and wonderful quality in the hands of the capitalist.

Originally, the wage-worker, who was not a member of the family of his employer, had to earn wages high enough to defray not only his own expenses but those of his family in order to enable him to propagate himself and to bequeath his labor power to others. Without this process on his part, the heirs of the capitalists would find no proletarians ready made for exploitation.

When, however, the wife, and, from early infancy, the children of the workingman are able to take care of themselves, then the wages of the male workingman can be safely reduced to the level of his own personal needs without the risk of stopping the supply of fresh labor power.

Over and above this, the labor of women and children affords the additional advantage that these offer less resistance than men; and their introduction into the ranks of the workers increases wonderfully the quantity of labor that is offered for sale in the market.

Accordingly, the labor of women and children not only lowers the necessities of the workingman, but it also diminishes his capacity for resistance in that it overstocks the labor market: owing to both these circumstances it lowers the wages of the workingman.

III.

DISSOLUTION OF THE PROLETARIAN FAMILY.

The labor of woman in productive pursuits betokens the total destruction of the family life of the workingman, without substituting for it a higher form of family relationship. The capitalist system of production does not yet generally destroy the single household of the workingman, but robs it of all its bright, and leaves only its dark

sides. The activity of women to-day in industrial pursuits does not mean to her freedom from household duties; it means to her an increase of her former burdens by a new one. But we cannot serve two masters. The household of the workingman suffers whenever his wife must help to earn the daily bread. What present society puts in the place of the individual household and family which it destroys, are miserable substitutes: soup-houses and day nurseries, where the offals of the physical and mental sustenance of the rich are cast to the lower classes.

Socialists are charged with an intent to abolish the family. We do know that every system of production has had a special form of household, to which corresponds a special system of family relationship. We do not consider the existing form of the family the highest possible nor the last utterance upon the subject; and we do expect that a new and improved social system may yet develop a new and higher form of family relationship. But to hold this view is a very different thing from striving to dissolve all family bonds. Those who do destroy the family bonds—who not only mean to but who in fact do destroy them right under our own eyes—they are, not the Socialists, but the capitalists themselves. Many a slave-holder has before this torn husband from wife, and parents from grown-up children; but the capitalists have improved upon the abominations of slavery: they tear the suckling from the breast of its mother, and compel her to intrust it to strangers' hands. And yet a society in which hundreds of thousands of such instances are of daily occurrence, a society whose luminaries promote "benevolent" institutions for the purpose of making easy the separation of the mothers from their babes, such a society has the effrontery to accuse the Socialists of contemplating the abolition of the family simply because they, basing their opinion upon the fact that the "family" has ever been one of the reflexes of the system of production, foresee that further changes in that system must also result in a more perfect system of family relationship.

IV.

PROSTITUTION.

Hand in hand with the accusation on the subject of the family bonds goes the accusation that Socialists aim at a community of wives. This charge is as false as the other. Socialists, on the contrary, main-

tain that just the reverse of a community in wives, and of all sexual oppression and license, to wit, ideal love, will be the foundation of matrimonial connections in a Socialist Commonwealth, and that pure love can only prevail in such a social system. What, on the other hand, do we see to-day?

The irrational system of modern production tears the sexes apart. It builds up she-towns in New England and he-towns in the mining districts of Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio and the farther West, thereby directly promoting and inciting prostitution as a natural and inevitable result. Furthermore, helpless women, forced to earn their living in factories, shops and mines, fall a prey to capitalist cupidity; the capitalist takes advantage of their inexperience, offers them wages too slight for their support, and hints at, or even brazenly refers them to, prostitution as a means of supplementing their income. Everywhere, the increase of female labor in industry is accompanied by an increase of prostitution. In the modern State, where Christianity is preached and piety is at a premium, many a "thriving" branch of industry is found whose working women are paid so poorly that they would be compelled to starve unless they prostituted themselves; and wonderful to say, in such instances the capitalist will ever be heard to protest that these small wages are indispensable to enable him to compete successfully in the market, and to maintain his establishment in a "thriving" condition.

Prostitution is as old as the contrast between rich and poor. At one time, however, prostitutes constituted a middle class between beggars and thieves; they were then an article of luxury, which society indulged in, but the loss of which would in no way have endangered its existence. To-day, however, it is no longer the females of the slums alone, but working women who are compelled to sell their bodies for money. This latter sale is no longer simply a matter of luxury, it has become one of the foundations upon which production is carried on. Under the capitalistic system of production, prostitution becomes a pillar of society. What the defenders of this social system falsely charge Socialists with, is the very thing they are guilty of themselves: Community of wives is a feature of capitalism. Indeed, such deep roots has this system of community of wives cast in modern society that its representatives agree in declaring prostitution to be a necessary thing. They cannot understand that the abolition of the proletariat implies the abolition of prostitution. So deep are they

sunk in intellectual stagnation that they cannot conceive a social system without community of wives.

But be it noted, community of wives has ever been an invention of the upper layers of society, never of the proletariat. The community of wives is one of the modes of exploiting the proletariat; it is not Socialism; it is the exact opposite of Socialism.

V.

THE INDUSTRIAL RESERVE ARMY.

We have seen that the introduction of female and child-labor in industry is one of the most powerful means whereby the capitalists reduce the wages of workingmen. There is, however, another means, which, periodically, is just as powerful, to wit, the introduction of workingmen from neighborhoods that are backward, and whose population has slight wants, but whose labor-power has not yet been unnerved by the factory system. The development of production upon a large scale, of machinery, namely, makes possible not only the employment of such untrained workmen in the place of trained ones, but also their cheap and prompt transportation to the place where they are wanted. Hand in hand with the development of production goes the system of transportation; colossal production corresponds with colossal transportation not of merchandise only, but of persons also. Steamships and railroads, these much-vaunted pillars of civilization, not only carry guns, liquor and syphilis to barbarians, but they also bring the barbarians to us, and with them their barbarism. The flow of agricultural laborers into the cities is becoming ever stronger; and from ever farther regions are the swarms of those drawing nearer who have less wants, are more patient, and offer less resistance. Slovacs, Swedes and Italians emigrate to Germany; Germans, Belgians, Italians emigrate to France; Slovacs, Germans, Italians, Irishmen, Swedes, emigrate to England; Slovacs, Russians, Armenians, Swedes, Italians, Irish, English and Chinese emigrate to the United States—all of them bearing down upon wages in each place. All these foreign workingmen are partly expropriated people, small farmers and producers, whom the capitalist system of production has ruined, driven on the street, and deprived, not only of a home, but also of a country. Socialism is often charged by the Philistines with lack of patriotism;

look at these swarms of emigrants; what is it but capitalism that has expatriated these wretches, and inflicted upon them the bane of exile?

Through the expropriation of the small farmers and producers, through the importation from distant lands of large masses of labor, through the development of woman and child-labor, through the shortening of the time necessary to acquire a trade, through all these means the capitalist system of production is enabled to increase stupendously the quantity of labor-forces that are at its disposal. And side by side with this goes a steady increase in the productivity of human labor as the result of the uninterrupted progress in technical arts.

Simultaneously with these tendencies, the machine steadily tends to displace workingmen and render them superfluous. Every machine saves labor-power: unless it did that it would be useless. In every branch of industry—and be it well remembered, agriculture is to-day an industry and is identically affected—the transition from hand to machine labor is accompanied with the greatest amount of suffering to the workingmen who are affected by it, who, whether they be mechanics or handicraftsmen, or whether they be farm hands, engaged in ploughing, reaping or picking cotton, are made superfluous by the machine and are thrown out upon the streets and roadsides. It was this effect of machinery that the workingmen felt first. Many riots during the first years of the last century, and not infrequent occurrences to-day, attest the quantity of suffering which the transition from hand to machine labor, or the introduction of improved machinery, inflicts upon the working class, and the despair to which they are thereby driven. The introduction of machinery, as well as its subsequent improvement, is every time baneful to the workingmen whom it affects. True enough under certain conditions, other workmen may gain thereby, such workingmen, for instance, as may be employed in the manufacture of the machine itself; but, in the first place, these happy ones are to-day always much fewer than those who suffer; and in the second place, it may well be doubted whether a consciousness of this fact could go far to console the starving ones.

Every new machine causes either as much to be produced as before with fewer workmen, or, to produce a larger quantity of articles with no increase in the number of workmen. It follows therefrom that, if in a country the number of workmen employed does not decrease with the development of the system of machinery, then the market must be extended in proportion to the increased productivity

of these workmen. Seeing, however, that the economic development increases the productivity of labor at the same time that it increases in a greater degree the quantity of disposable labor, it follows that, in order to prevent enforced idleness among the workmen, the market must be extended at a much more rapid pace than the pace at which the productivity of labor is increased by the machine. Such a rapid extension of the market has, however, rarely occurred under the rule of capitalist production. It follows that enforced idleness is a permanent phenomenon under the capitalist system of production, and is inseparable from it. Even in the best of times, when the market suddenly undergoes a considerable extension and business is briskest, production is not able to furnish work to all the unemployed; during bad times, however, when business is at a standstill, their number rises to fabulous figures. In fact, the unemployed constitute quite an army—the industrial reserve army, as Marx called it; it is an army of labor forces that stands ever ready, at the disposal of the capitalist; an army out of which he can draw his reserves whenever the industrial campaign grows hot.

To the capitalist, this reserve army is invaluable. It places in his hands a powerful weapon with which to curb and subject the army of the unemployed. After excessive work on the part of some has produced lack of work for others, then the idleness of these is used as a means to keep up and even increase the excessive work of the former. And yet there are people who will contend that matters are to-day arranged at their best!

Although the size of the industrial reserve army rises and falls with the ups and downs of business, nevertheless, on the whole, it shows a steady tendency to increase. This is inevitable. The technical development moves on at an ever increasing pace, and steadily increases its fields of operations, while on the other hand, the extension of the markets is hemmed in by natural bounds.

What, then, is the full significance of lack of work? It signifies not only want and misery to the unemployed, not only intensified vassalage and exploitation to the employed; it signifies, furthermore, uncertainty of livelihood to the whole working class.

Whatever hardships former modes of exploitation inflicted upon the exploited, one boon they left them: the certainty of a livelihood. The sustenance of the serf and the slave was assured at least so long as the life of the master himself was assured. Only when the master perished was the existence of his dependents in peril. Whatever

amount of misery and dearth broke out over the people under former systems of production, such visitations were never the result of production itself, they were the result of a disturbance of production, brought on by failures of crop, drouths, floods, irruptions of hostile armies, etc., etc.

To-day the existence of the exploiter and the exploited are not bound up in each other. At any moment the workman can be thrown upon the street with wife and children, and be given over to starvation, without the exploiter, whom he has made rich, being the worse for it.

To-day, the misery of enforced idleness is only in very exceptional instances the result of a disturbance in production through influences from without; enforced idleness among the workingmen is but a necessary result of the development of the present system of production. To-day, just the reverse happens of what happened under former systems of production. To-day, such disturbances in production rather improve the opportunities for work than otherwise; war, with all its devastating influences, has for its result an immediate increase in the demand for labor.

Under our former system of production on a small scale, the income of the worker was in proportion to his industry. Laziness ruined him, and finally threw him out of work. To-day, on the contrary, lack of work is greater the more and the longer the workman toils: he brings enforced idleness upon himself by his own toil. Among the many homely adages, which originated during the system of small production, and which capitalist large production has reversed, the following is one: "The industry of the laborer builds up his house;" likewise has the maxim, so often upon the lips of the Philistines, that "whoever will work will find bread" been turned into a lie.

To-day the possession of strength to labor is, to the workingman, as unreliable a shield against want and misery as property itself is to the small producer: as the spectre of bankruptcy casts its shadow across the path of the small farmer and small industrialist, so does the spectre of "out of work" darken that of the wage-worker. Of all the ills that attend the present system of production, the most trying, the most aggravating, that which harrow's men's souls deepest, and which pulls by the roots every instinct of conservatism, is the permanent uncertainty of a livelihood. This eternal uncertainty of one's own condition undermines one's hopes in the certainty of life, and all its interest in its preservation.

Excessive work, lack of work, the dissolution of the family—these are the gifts which the capitalist system of production carries to the proletariat at the same time that it causes that class to swell from day to day, and its condition to spread perceptibly, more and more, over the whole population.

VI.

THE STEADY INCREASE OF THE PROLETARIAT—MERCANTILE AND EDUCATED PROLETARIAT.

It is not only through the extension of large production that the capitalist system causes the condition of the proletariat to become more and more that of the whole population. It brings this about also through the circumstance that the condition of the wage-worker, engaged in large production, strikes the keynote for the condition of wage-workers in all other branches. The conditions under which the latter work and live are revolutionized; the advantages, which they may have had over those employed in capitalist industry, are turned into so many disadvantages under the influence of the latter. To illustrate, in those localities where mechanics still work for, and board and lodge with, the master mechanic, the poor board and lodging which the wage-worker, employed in a capitalist industry, can afford become a pretext for the master mechanic to reduce both the board and the comforts of lodging which his workmen enjoyed. Again, formerly the long period requisite for apprenticeship, was a means to prevent the overstocking of a trade; to-day, the system of apprenticeship, conducted under the guise of benevolence in many of our large cities, and called Trades Schools, notably in New York and Pittsburgh, is one of the most effective means to overrun many a trade with cheap labor, and to knock the bread from the mouths of the adult laborers. In this respect also, as in so many others, those institutions, which, under the system of small production, were sensible and beneficent, have, under the influence of the capitalist system, become either nonsensical or hurtful.

There is another, and very extensive, domain on which the capitalist system of large production exercises its influence of turning the population into proletarians—the domain of commerce. The large stores have begun to bear, and are now bearing heavily upon the

small ones. The number of small stores does not, therefore, necessarily diminish. On the contrary, it increases. The small store is the last refuge of the bankrupt small producer. Were the small stores actually crowded out, the ground would be wholly taken from under the feet of the small traders; they would then be forthwith thrust below the class of the proletariat—into the slums; they would be turned into beggars, vagabonds and candidates for the penitentiary! Such in fact is, to a great extent, the evolution of the small trader.

But it is not in the reduction of the number of small stores, it is in the debasement of their character that the influence of large production manifests itself in commerce. The small trader deals in ever worse and cheaper goods; the tribe of the habberdasher grows; and the streets and roads are overrun with peddlers, itinerant venders and hucksters of all manner of worthless articles: of spoiled fruit, decayed vegetables, etc., etc., sold under false pretences with all sorts of fraudulent devices, such as deceptive measures and weights. Thus the livelihood of the independent small trader becomes ever more precarious, more proletarian-like, while, steadily and at the same time, in the large stores, the number of employes goes up—genuine proletarians, without prospect of ever becoming independent. Woman and child-labor, with their accompaniment of prostitution; excessive work; lack of work; starvation wages;—all the symptoms of large production appear also in increasing quantity in the domain of commerce. Steadily the condition of the employes in this department approaches that of the proletarians in the department of production. The only difference perceptible between the two is that the former preserve the appearances of a better living, which require sacrifices unknown to the industrial proletarians.

There is still a third category of proletarianism that has gone far on the road of its complete development: the educated proletarians. Education has become a special trade under our present system. The measure of knowledge has increased greatly, and grows daily. Capitalist society and the capitalist State are ever more in need of men of knowledge and ability to conduct their business, in order to bring the forces of nature under their power, be it for purposes of production or of destruction, or to enable them to expend in luxurious living their increasing profits. Now, then, it is not only the hardworking small farmer, mechanic, or the proletarians in general, who have no time to devote themselves to science and art; the merchant, the manufacturer, the banker, the stock-jobber, the landlord class—all of these

are in the same fix. Their whole time is taken up either with their work, or with their "business" and pleasures, as the case may be. In modern society, it is not, as it used to be under previous social orders, the exploiters themselves, or at least a class of them, who nurse the arts and sciences. The present exploiters, our ruling class, leave these pursuits to a special class, whom they keep in hire. Under this system, education becomes a merchandise.

A hundred years ago or so, this commodity was rare. There were few schools; study was accompanied with considerable expense. So long as small production could support the worker, he stuck to it; only special gifts of nature or favorable circumstances would cause the sons of these to dedicate themselves to the arts and sciences. Incredible, or unlikely, as it may look at first blush, even in so new a country as the United States, the demand for physicians, teachers, artists, etc., etc., was, for quite a long number of years, supplied almost entirely by this limited class and its descendants.

So long as this condition of things lasted, the merchandise education commanded a high price. Its possession procured, at least to those who applied it to practical ends, lawyers, for instance, physicians, professors, etc., quite comfortable livings; not infrequently it also brought fame and honor. The artist, the poet, the philosopher, were, in monarchical countries, the companions of royalty; in our republic they were persons of unquestioned distinction. The aristocracy of intellect felt itself superior to the aristocracy of birth or money. The only care of such was the development of their intellect. Hence it happened that people of culture could be, and often were, idealists. This circumstance explains the appearance, in the forties, of that galaxy of men and women, who took up in this country the idealist philosophy of Fourier, resulting in the communistic tidal wave that swept over the land at that season. These aristocrats of education and culture stood above the other classes and their material aspirations and antagonisms. Education meant power, happiness and worthiness. The conclusion seemed inevitable, that, in order to make all men happy and worthy, in order to banish all class antagonisms, all poverty, all wickedness and meanness out of the world, nothing else was needed than to spread education and culture.

Since those days the development of higher education has made immense progress. The number of institutions of learning increased wonderfully, and, in a still larger degree, the number of pupils. In the meantime, the bottom was knocked out of small production. The

small property-holder knows to-day no other way of keeping his sons from sinking into the proletariat than by sending them to college; and he does this if his means will at all allow. But, furthermore, he must consider the future, not of his sons only, but of his daughters also. The rapid development in the division of labor is steadily encroaching upon the household; it is converting one household duty after another into a special industry, and steadily diminishing household work. Weaving, sewing to a great extent, knitting, baking and many other occupations, that at one time filled up the round of household duties, have been either wholly or substantially withdrawn from the sphere of house-keeping. More than fifty years ago, the "store close" of which Artemus Ward loved to make frequent mention, began, in this country, to compete with and supplant the homespun; and similarly, many another home-made staple was extinguished, and its production absorbed by specialized industries. As a result of all this, matrimony, where the wife is to be housekeeper only, is becoming more and more a matter of luxury. But it so happens that the small property-holder and producer is, at the same time, sinking steadily, and steadily becoming poorer; ever more and more he loses the means to indulge in luxuries. In consequence of this, the number of spinsters grows apace, and ever larger is the number of those families in which mother and daughter must work for a living. Accordingly, woman labor does not only increase in the domains of both large and small production and commerce, it also spreads in other directions—in government offices, on the telegraph, telephone, railroads, banks, in office clerkships—book-keeping, typewriting, stenography—and in the sphere of the arts and sciences. However loudly prejudices and personal interests may rebel against it, woman labor presses itself forward more and more upon the various professional pursuits. It is not vanity, nor importunity, nor pride, but the force of the economic development that drives woman to labor in these as well as in other departments of human activity. In those countries and those localities of the United States where the men have succeeded in excluding the competition of women from those branches of intellectual pursuits which are still organized upon the old guild principle, the latter press with all the greater force upon those pursuits that are not so organized, like writing, painting, music, etc.

The result of this whole development is that the number of educated people has increased enormously. Nevertheless, the beneficent results, which the idealists expected from an increase of education,

have not followed. So long as education is a merchandise, its extension is tantamount to an increase in the quantity of that merchandise, consequently, to the falling of its price, and the decline of the condition of those who possess it. The number of educated people has grown to such an extent that it more than suffices for the wants of the capitalists and of the capitalist State. The labor market of educated labor is to-day as overstocked as that of manual labor. To-day, it is no longer the manual workers alone who have their reserve army of the unemployed, and are afflicted with lack of work; the educated workers also have their reserve army of idleness, and among them also lack of work has taken up its permanent quarters. Those who strain for a public office experience the difficulty of obtaining it by reason of the crowd; those others who seek employment elsewhere experience the extremes of idleness and excessive work the same as the manual workers, and just the same as these they are victims of wage-slavery.

The condition of the educated workers deteriorates visibly; formerly, people spoke of the "aristocracy of intellect," to-day we speak of the "intellectual" or "educated" proletariat; the time is near when the bulk of these proletarians will be distinguishable from the others only by their conceit. Most of these still imagine they are something better than the manual proletarians; they fancy themselves members of the ruling class; but this attitude distinguishes itself in nothing from that of the lackeys, who, behind the backs of their masters, put on airs of lordship. These "educated proletarians" have ceased to be the intellectual leaders of the capitalist class; they are to-day, to the capitalist and to capitalist institutions, what "bruisers" and "gougers" are to low taverns. Scheming and plotting are their leading pursuits; their first thought is not the development of their intellectual goods, but the sale of these; their principal method of getting along is the prostitution of their own individuality. The same as with the small producers, they are dazzled by a few brilliant prizes in the lottery of life, they shut their eyes to the numberless blanks in the wheel, and barter away body and soul for the merest chance of drawing such a prize. The barter and sale of one's convictions and a marriage for money, these are, in the eyes of the majority of our educated proletarians two means, as natural as they are necessary, "to make one's fortune." Into such creatures has the capitalist system of production turned our idealists, inventors, thinkers, and dreamers!

Still, the supply of this class grows so rapidly that there is little

to be made out of education, even though one throws his own individuality into the bargain. The decline of the bulk of educated people into the class of the proletariat can no longer be checked.

Whether this development will result in a movement of the educated people to join the battling proletariat in mass, and not, as hitherto, singly, is still uncertain. This, however, is certain: the fact that the educated people are being turned into proletarians has closed to the class of the proletariat the only gate that was still open, and through which its members might, by dint of their own unaided efforts, have been able to escape into the class above.

It is out of all question that the wage-worker can become a capitalist, at least not in the ordinary run of events. Sensible people do not consider the chances of earning a prize in the Louisiana lottery, or of one's falling heir to the wealth of some unknown relative, when they deal with the condition of the working class. Under certain particularly favorable circumstances it did formerly happen, here and there, that a workman succeeded by dint of great privations to save up enough wherewith to start a little industry of his own, or set up a little retail shop, or give his son a chance to study and become something "better" than his father. It was always ridiculous to hold out such possibilities to the workmen as the means of improving their condition. In the ordinary course of events the workingman may thank his stars if he is at all able, during good times, to lay by enough not to remain empty handed when work becomes slack. To-day, however, to hold out such possibilities to the workman is more ridiculous than ever. The economic development does not only make saving, on the part of the workingman, more and more difficult, if at all possible, but it also renders it utterly impossible, even though he may be able to save up something, to therewith pull himself and his children out of the class of the proletariat. To invest his little savings in some small independent industry, were for him to fly from the frying pan into the fire; ten to one, he will be flung back to his previous condition, with the bitter experience that the small producer can no longer keep his head above water—an experience which he will have purchased with the loss of his hard-earned savings.

Still more difficult than the transition into the class of the small producer, indeed, utterly hopeless is the attempt on the part of the proletarian to give his son a chance to study. But let it be accepted, for the sake of argument, that such an attempt has been successful; of what use will a college education be to the son of the proletariat,

who, being without funds and without influence, cannot wait for a good chance to sell his knowledge, in these days when thousands of lawyers, doctors, engineers and all manner of professional men are going about hungry?

To-day, whichever way the proletarian may turn, he finds awaiting him the same proletarian conditions of life and of toil; those conditions pervade society more and more; in all countries the bulk of the population has sunk to the level of the proletariat; to the individual proletarian all prospect has vanished of ever being able, by his own efforts, to pull himself out of the quagmire into which the present system of production has pushed him. The forecast of James Madison, made sixty-five years ago, that, owing to our competitive social system, the bulk of our people would ere long have lost, not only all property, but even the hope or the prospect of acquiring any, has been verified to the letter.

The individual proletarian can accomplish his own redemption only with the redemption of his whole class. The consummation cannot, however, be reached without the collective ownership by the people of their instruments of production, i. e., by the Co-operative Commonwealth.

At every previous social revolution, or be it evolution, class superseded class. Thus the theocratic class superseded the patriarchic; the feudal superseded the theocratic; and, in our own days, the capitalist superseded the feudal. In each instance a class below upset the class above, emancipated itself by subjugating others, and introduced a new form of human exploitation.

To rear, on the contrary, the Co-operative Commonwealth; to abolish all class antagonisms by abolishing the last of the systems of human exploitation; to redeem itself, and, alone of all classes in the social evolution of the human species, to accomplish its own redemption together with that of the whole, not at the expense of any portion, of mankind—that is the historic mission of the Proletariat; that is the noble aim that swells with pride the breast, and sweetens the present bitterness of the lot, of every Proletarian, who is conscious of his class distinction, and the obligation it imposes upon him.

VII.

DOWNFALL OF THE SMALL PRODUCER.

Socialism maintains that:

1. The economic development of the capitalist social system leads with the certainty of doom to the downfall of small production, whose foundation is the private ownership by the worker in his means of production—machinery, tools, land, etc.; it divorces the worker from his means of production and transforms him into a propertiless proletarian, while the means of production themselves become the monopoly of a comparatively small number of capitalists and landlords.

2. Hand in hand with this monopolization of the means of production proceeds the crowding away of the disjointed small industries by colossal concerns, the development of the tool into a machine, and the gigantic increase in the productive capacity of human labor. But all the advantages of this transformation are monopolized by the capitalists and landlords. To the proletariat and the sinking middle classes—artisans, small farmers, etc.—it means only greater uncertainty of livelihood, and increase of misery, oppression, vassalage, degradation and exploitation.

3. The number of the proletariat grows larger and larger; the army of superfluous workers swells ever more and more; the contrast between exploiters and exploited grows ever sharper; and ever bitterer grows the class struggle between capitalists and proletarians, which divides modern society into two hostile armies, and is the distinguishing characteristic of all industrial countries.

4. The chasm between the property holders and the propertiless is further widened by the crises which are inherent in the capitalist system of production, which spread over an ever-increasing area and become ever more destructive, which raise the popular uncertainty in the earning of a livelihood into a normal condition of society, and which furnish proof positive that the productive powers of modern society have grown over its head, and that the system of private ownership of the means of production has become irreconcilable with the adequate application and complete development of these productive forces.

Many a fellow imagines he has said something clever when, in opposition to this, he declares: "There is nothing new under the sun; as things are to-day, so have they ever been and so will they ever be."

Yet is there no more mistaken and foolish assertion than this. Modern science has proved that nothing is at a standstill; society, like nature, undergoes a steady development.

Production, whether in agricultural or industrial pursuits, starts with the labor of the individual alone, or of individual families. The productivity of such efforts is slight. So long as this stage lasts industry is carried on upon a small scale. At this stage, at the stage of small production, the product depends wholly upon the laborer, upon his personality, his diligence, his powers of endurance. As a result of this, he appropriates his own product as his personal property. But this individuality in production cannot be developed by the laborer unless he is personally free and can freely dispose of his means of production; in other words, unless these means of production are his private property. Private property in the means of production is the basis of small production.

Now, it is this very ownership by the small producers in their means of production that the economic development of capitalism destroys, and thereby it abolishes the system of small production and the small producers themselves.

The stages by which this development takes place are at first imperceptible, until the stages of manufactory and finally of the factory itself are reached. In this development machinery plays a gigantic role. By its introduction the capitalist system was finally placed in possession of a weapon which enabled it to overcome easily all opposition, and turned the course of economic development into a triumphal march for capital. This march was further accelerated by the invention of the steam power, which by degrees conquered all the industrial nations of the world. The productivity of labor was thereby multiplied many thousandfold. Communication and transportation were in their turn revolutionized. Prices tumbled down in proportion as merchandise became more plentiful; and in proportion as this process went and still goes on small production, and with it the small producer, went, and is going, by the board. To attempt to compete with production on a large scale, propelled by steam and electricity, is an act of despair on the part of the small farmer or city industrialist; neither can produce as plentifully, hence as cheaply, as the perfected factory or large farm; their prices must be higher than the market can afford, and their downfall is but a question of time. That there should still be as many small farmers and industrialists as there are to-day is simply an evidence of the capacity of man for starvation.

The complete disappearance of small production is, however, not

the first act of a tragedy that may be entitled "The Downfall of Small Production." The first effect of capitalist competition is that the artisan—and what is said of him holds good at all points of the small farmer—begins to throw into the breach, one after another, all the savings of his own industry, together with such as may have come down to him from previous generations. The small fellow grows poor; to stem his decline he becomes more industrious; the hours of labor are lengthened, and drawn deep into the night; wife and children are dragged into the vortex; yet despite all this, and notwithstanding the extreme lengthening of the hours of labor and the feverish activity that affords him neither pause nor rest, the quantity of food he consumes becomes steadily less, and the expense for household and clothing suffer ever increasing retrenchment. There is no existence more miserable than that of the small farmer or small industrial producer who is endeavoring to hold his own in competition with a large agricultural or industrial producer.

There is no little truth in the saying that the wage-earner of to-day is better off than the small farmer or the small industrial producer. Those who most frequently use this phrase mean to imply thereby that the wage-worker has no reason to complain. This statement is, however, a boomerang that hits, not the Socialists, but the advocates of capitalism. If, indeed, those who are wholly propertiless are better off than those small producers who still have some property left, of what use can property be said to be to the latter? If the artisan and the small farmer stick to their small production, although they could earn more in the factory as wage-workers, simply because they still retain some property, it is evident that their property hurts rather than benefits them. To the small producer, whether agricultural or industrial, his property has been transformed from a shield against into a bond that fetters him to misery. To him the effect of private ownership in the means of production has changed character; that which a hundred years ago was a blessing to his class has now become a curse.

But, it may be objected, this misery is the price which the small agricultural or industrial producer pays for the greater degree of independence which he enjoys over the wage-worker, who is wholly propertiless. Even this is false! Wherever small production is forced into competition with large production, the former sinks quickly into complete dependence upon the latter. The artisan becomes an appendage to the establishment of the capitalists; his home becomes an outhouse of the factory, or he sinks still lower. And as to the small farmer, to whom it is impossible to stand up against capitalist compe-

tion as farmer, he is forced either to take up some industrial pursuit in his home as the employee of capital, or he is bound to hire out either himself or members of his family as wage-workers to the large farmer. What has become of the independence of these? Their little property is the only thing that distinguishes them from the proletarian, and it is this very property that prevents them from taking advantage of the best opportunities to labor; it rivets them to their own threshold, with the effect of making them more dependent than the wage-workers who are wholly propertiless. Observation shows that private ownership in the means of production not only increases the physical misery, but also the dependence of the small holder. The effect of these small holdings has wholly changed character; before the days of large production these small holdings were a bulwark of freedom; to-day they are a means of slavery.

Another contention is that such small holdings vest in the producing small farmer or artisan the product of his labor. Where this is true it is but a trifling consolation, considering that the declining prices brought on by large production render the product of these small producers insufficient for their domestic needs. But even this consolation is mainly illusory. It does not hold good in most cases; for instance, it is wholly false in the cases of those who are in debt. The usurer who has a mortgage on a farm has a stronger claim upon the labor of the farmer than the farmer himself. The usurer must be first satisfied, only what is left falls to the farmer; whether this remainder suffices to support the farmer and his family does not concern the usurer. Accordingly, the small agricultural and industrial producers work as absolutely for the capitalist as does the wage-worker. The only difference established between them by the private property of the former is that the wages of the propertiless workmen is, in general, controlled by their needs, while in the case of the small property holders, there is no limit downward; it frequently happens that interest on mortgages will absorb the whole product of the labor of the small holder. In that case he has worked for nothing and paid his own expenses to boot—all this, thanks to his ownership of a little property!

What can be the result of this painful wrestling of the small with the gigantic power of the large producer? What future is there in store for the small agricultural and industrial producer as a reward for his thrift and his industry, and of his having dragged his wife and children with him into slavery at the cost of their physical and mental ruin? The reward for all this is bankruptcy, their final divorce from

all means of production, their downfall into the class of the proletariat.

This is the inevitable result of the economic development in modern society, a result that is as inevitable as death itself. The same as death may appear as a deliverer to him who is afflicted with a painful disease, so does bankruptcy, too, often present itself as a deliverer to him who was bound down by the burden of small property. Such is the degradation and misery of the small producers that it is doubtful whether it is not less charitable to keep them up in their present condition, and thereby defer the day of their final downfall into the class of the proletariat, than actually to hasten the process. Because, let it be remembered, it can only be a question of deferring their final downfall; to reinstate the small producer in his pristine vigor is simply impossible in these days of steam and electricity.

This is a bitter truth to those who are interested in the upholding of the present social system, because the small farmer and the small city producer are recognized as the main props of the present system of private ownership in the means of production. For this reason the exploiting class is beating about for panaceas to save the small producer. The woods are full of quacks ready with specifics for absolute cure. In most cases these specifics are old. They have all shown their uselessness or their harmfulness. At best they can be useful only to a favored few, who may thereby be enabled to drop their small production and swing themselves up into the category of large producers, i. e., capitalists—at the expense, of course, of their less favored comrades, out of whose class they have raised themselves.

All the "social reforms," all the schemes to save the small farmer and small producer generally, may be compared, in so far as they are at all effective, with a lottery: a few may make a hit, but the large majority draw only blanks, and must foot not only the bills of the happy few who draw the prizes, but also of the whole scheme. If a poor devil who holds in his pocket a lottery ticket, were to imagine himself rich because of it, he would be considered a fool. And yet this is exactly the mental condition of but too many small agricultural and industrial producers. They imagine they are that which they would like to be; not what they are in fact. They carry themselves as capitalists, yet are they not a whit better off than proletarians.

Present or prospective proletarianism is the lot of the masses of our people, if the capitalist system of production is to remain in force. Freedom cannot be conquered or reconquered without the national, collective, ownership of the means of production; without, in a word, the co-operative commonwealth.

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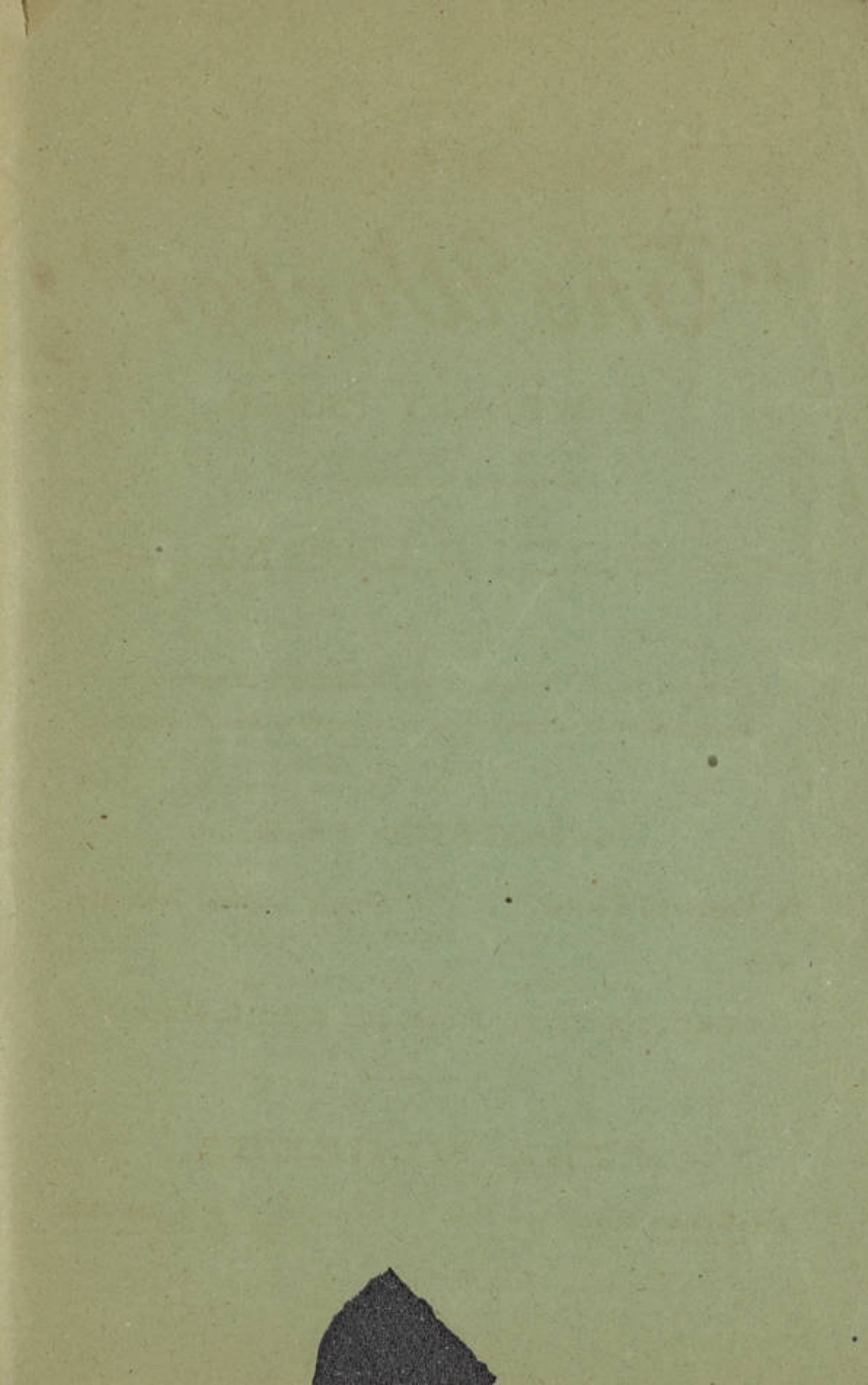
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